Many dogs are frightened of fireworks and loud noises but there are things you can do to reduce the amount of stress suffered by your dog.

How you can help your dog

The first thing to do if you are concerned about your dog's reaction to fireworks is to watch him for signs of stress and anxiety. These can include:

- trembling
- restlessness
- destructiveness
- hiding
- pacing
- panting
- attention seeking
- shaking
- escape behaviour
- loss of house training
- whining
- barking

Any of these types of behaviour could indicate that your dog is developing a phobia towards noise. Occasionally, once a phobia begins to develop, your dog may begin to display similar symptoms towards other sudden noises, so it is very important to seek advice at the earliest opportunity.

Early experiences are very important for the development of puppies and if dogs are exposed to a variety of sights and sounds from an early age, they're less likely to have adverse reactions when they grow up. However, there's no guarantee that even the soundest of dogs won't display an unexpected reaction later in life – it only takes a single scary event to induce a fear response.

Bonfire night is the main cause of sudden noise phobia

What you *can* do

- Make sure his environment is safe and that he cannot escape.
- Ensure he always wears a collar and disc just in case of a successful escape attempt

- Ignore any signs of restlessness and stress and reward any calm, relaxed behaviour
- Prepare a 'den' for him, away from windows. Cover a table with a blanket or place his bed behind a sofa where he will feel safe, secure and comfortable, or use a covered dog crate
- Close the curtains to reduce the likelihood of flashes and turn on the TV or radio
- Feed your dog before the noise starts – this should encourage him to rest
- Don't leave him alone – dogs are pack animals and need the security and confidence provided by the presence of others
- Occupy him with food-filled toys or other fun activities
- Choose safe times for exercise and toileting
- Temporarily move his sleeping area. Moving it closed to you can increase his confidence
- Remain calm and relaxed yourself (even if you're frightened of fireworks too!)
- Use a desensitisation CD to gradually encourage your dog to become used to the sounds he fears
- Try a D.A.P. diffuser. This plugs into the wall and releases dog appeasing pheromones similar to those released by a bitch rearing puppies, to help calm a distressed dog
- Use a natural remedy such as Rescue Remedy, Anxiety TFLN, Zylkene or Serene-um. (It may be necessary to seek a prescription of stronger sedatives from your vet as an interim measure whilst you address the problem)

What *not* to do

- Let your dog go outside when fireworks are sounding, even if he shows no signs or stress
- Exercise or walk him when fireworks are likely
- Punish your dog for being frightened
- Leave him alone during the firework period
- Fuss or try and reassure your dog when he is frightened, as this rewards the fear behaviour and will encourage him to repeat it
- Take your dog to a firework display

Further help for you and your dog

If you take all these steps and your dog is still very distressed by firework noise, you may need some additional help from a health advisor, dog trainer, behaviourist or vet. The earlier you begin your preparations, the more likely it is that your dog will be able to cope with the sound of fireworks. A vet can give you specific techniques to help him/her to adjust to sudden sounds in a safe environment, or may refer you to a behaviourist.